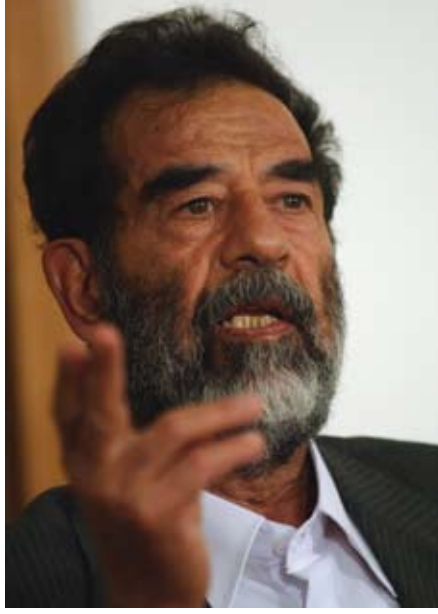


# No Leader Is Ever Off Stage

## Behavioral Analysis of Leadership

By BRENDA L. CONNORS

1<sup>st</sup> Combat Camera Squadron (D. Myles Cullen)



The many faces of Saddam Hussein from his 2004 hearing in Baghdad

**W**ith a better understanding of the behavior of foreign leaders, we can strengthen our ability to influence them and their decisions. Assessing these figures accurately—indeed, analyzing human motivation rationally—is a tough business. But predicting the behavior of often reclusive and complex individuals who possess weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is an essential task of modern government.

Reliable assessments of nuclear capabilities and human intention in North Korea and Iran top today's list of priorities. U.S. policy, strategy, and operational planning hinge on understanding remote adversarial regimes and our best guess at what their leaders will do next. Will North Korea's leader use his WMD? When? And how far will he go? Need we wait another year and witness more rounds of

United Nations (UN) Security Council deliberations before we know what *personally* motivates Iran's current leader? Not necessarily.

Until 1986, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had a vibrant Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior, led by Jerrold Post, a psychiatrist whose interdisciplinary team included experts in social, clinical, and political psychology, as well as cultural anthropology. The team's studies on Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat, for instance, provided critical guidance to President Jimmy Carter during the successful Camp David negotiations with and between those opposing leaders.

Today, several agencies, including the CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, and Federal Bureau of Investigation are building models of individuals relevant to agency mission. To enrich these biographical and political models, they use

a variety of analytical methods, such as social network and semantic content analysis of transcripts. Since 9/11, the imperative to do more and better in understanding leaders of interest has resulted in a self-examination of what and how such assessments are done, how they could be improved, and how best to share these improvements. Filling our knowledge gaps in these ways, analysts today are getting better at understanding and predicting leaders' actions.

### Movement Analysis

A promising new approach has evolved that may complement traditional ways of assessing leaders and their intentions. This method, called movement analysis, has implications for policy, strategy, and operations. It involves adding a different perceptual and analytic lens through which to assess leaders not well known to us to provide insights about how they might behave. This new kind of investigation can illuminate many issues, as it

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did in Iraq when it empowered us to distinguish the real Saddam Hussein from a possible double. Moreover, movement analysis can help gauge the general potential of an emerging head of state, such as Iran's president. It can also reveal evidence of psychological disorganization, substance dependency, or medical problems and provide insight into cognitive and decisionmaking styles. Such analysis offers a glimpse into a person's style at both the unconscious and conscious level, helping distinguish between a pro-forma expression and a convicted response indicating feeling or belief from a deeper source.

Extensive movement analysis had been undertaken on Saddam Hussein since the 1990s, which afforded baseline evidence about his decisionmaking style, including explanation for his "less rational" decisions. As far back as 1990, for example, observers questioned why he did not partially withdraw his troops from Kuwait while retaining the northern oil fields, which would have undermined the U.S. and multilateral position. Psycho-diagnostic measures of his movement reveal intermittent disorganization visible in his gestures.<sup>1</sup> These measurements can offer hypotheses about when and why Saddam remained attached to certain positions and missed other strategically wise opportunities.<sup>2</sup> Movement disorganization emerges as Saddam speaks about relinquishment of his WMD, and this disorganization offers insight into his psychological framework related to the weapons, and thus the poor prognosis of any policy to cut him off from them. Also, the body can offer hints of why exile or suicide was highly unlikely given his personal psychological framework.<sup>3</sup>

Analysis of Saddam's responses in 2003 to questions regarding whether he possessed WMD or had links to al Qaeda offers evidence on several levels both for policymakers, who must make decisions on war or peace, and for military planners and battlefield commanders, who must devise and enact strategic and operational plans. Today, because of the consistency and recurrence of behavioral patterns in the wake of Saddam's capture, there is an opportunity to validate certain hypotheses posed long before his capture. Such patterns are detectable even before a leader is elected, making analysis and planning even more reliable.

The human body is an almost untapped unorthodox instrument of power; it is the ultimate source and container of much strategic information. While it may appear that policy

alone determines a leader's actions, a leader's overall behavior (and its relation to policy) ultimately arises from a body/mind patterning that recurs and manifests on several levels to influence his decisions.<sup>4</sup> A national leader considers a wide range of strategic choices, but he filters these choices through a personal information base: his body's temperamental hardwiring.

Decoding an individual's intrinsic patterning can penetrate the body's functional and expressive level. Vladimir Putin's labored walking when he appeared on the world stage New Year's Day 2000, for instance, signaled to a behavioral movement analyst that as he rose ever higher politically, he had to overcome great life-long obstacles within himself. Such hurdles reflected in movement signature influence how he perceives himself and his role as Russia's leader.<sup>5</sup>

### The Leader Beneath the Performance

Careful study of a leader's behavior involves observing movement below the level of political performance. We have entered an age in which neuroscience discoveries and computerized event recorders can reliably capture quantitative and qualitative measures of human expression in .03 seconds if necessary.<sup>6</sup> Observing a leader's demeanor beneath the greasepaint penetrates beyond the coaching that image makers offer politicians performing on the stump or in interviews. Charisma, in the end, cannot be easily taught, and performance cannot so easily be improved or masked. When confronted by probing questions, even the most highly trained performers and politicians reveal in movements large and small their stresses, emotions, and movement contradiction. We can detect these signs if we are attuned to such sensing.

Until recently, the behavior of foreign leaders has been considered marginally relevant in the development of U.S. foreign policy and military planning. Domains such as political science, political psychology, public diplomacy, and psychological operations discuss the behavioral dimension but as yet do not directly observe or analyze people or context. But today's security environ-

ment demands that we consider a new point of view that focuses on people's behaviors and experiences.

### Bomb Damage Assessment

In March 2003, at the beginning of Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, the world hoped for a quick and clean extraction of Saddam Hussein from power. The night the United States precisely bombed his headquarters, there was great anticipation that Saddam would be gone shortly. Only hours later, the network television anchors suddenly announced that the Iraqi leader would make a statement. Then a man much resembling Saddam read a defiant speech to the world. Had the Iraqi leader survived the attack? Or was it one of his doubles?

The fog of war can wreak havoc with perceptions, as well as increase the stress levels of targeted adversaries like the former Iraqi dictator, who that evening appeared swollen in the face and wearing what was for him an unusual pair of spectacles. Background commentary and best guess estimates about whether this was the president of Iraq or one of his doubles kept the world glued to the television but actually distorted the general perception of what was happening. Careful analysis of the man wearing the beret and large eyeglasses on that March 2003 evening offered the expert movement analyst evidence that he was Saddam Hussein.

### Proof of Identity

Signature movement style is unique and so detailed that it can offer incontrovertible proof of who someone is in the flesh. Even if an imposter has had surgery to alter his facial appearance, he cannot exactly replicate the orig-

Framegrab from Al Jazeera television of an unconfirmed image of Hussein urging Iraqis to resist the U.S.-led occupation



AP/Wide World Photo-Al Jazeera TV

inal. Contrastive analysis of a subject against the self offers micro-evidence in myriad categories, such as head and gaze behavior, handedness, body posture, rhythm, and archetypes of personality that can be compared against a so-called imposter. In addition to tracking what is moving, we can also assess the quality of how someone moves.<sup>7</sup>

In April 2003, a month into the second Gulf War, the networks announced, “Saddam is walking the streets of Um Quasr, Baghdad,” and CNN commentators again asked, “Is this a double?” Even with the poorest of footage shot from 40 feet away, behavioral movement evidence revealed that the man was Saddam. The fact that he was surrounded by several of his closest aides was one cue, but his signature passive body attitude, style of interaction with those surrounding and touching him, and micro-facial expressions offered other sound evidence. One particular display of stress,<sup>8</sup> barely visible to even a trained observer, strengthened the evidence: Saddam displayed his stress sign of rubbing his left eyelid with his left hand. He did that at a moment when people milling around him came well inside the space he prefers to maintain between himself and others.

Scratching his left eyelid may seem insignificant in day-to-day behavior, but such a subtle recurrence of signature evidence can help identify the man. First, it is observable evidence of an idiosyncratic expression that is a verifiable element of his repertoire. Second, its emergence in context is an indicator of his patterned interaction style and the extreme discomfort he consistently displays when he is in close contact with people.

The war on terror increasingly demands reliable measures in the area of identity confirmation. Amidst the chaos of insurgency and war, when America’s most wanted remain on the run, the remote capacity to identify elusive and lethal figures can save time and lives.

### Patterns of Expression

Saddam granted CNN’s Peter Arnett an interview in January 1991, 2 weeks into the first Iraq war while bombs were dropping around his offices. Maintaining control at all costs and featuring himself as the center of attention are the mainstays of Saddam’s patterned movement style. The same pattern emerged 12 years later when he appeared on television to show that he was still alive and in control. This bold appearance revealed the consistency of his behavior and was predict-

ably what Saddam would do. Even with the fires of war burning around him, the patterns drove his actions, and he could not fail to take advantage of that kind of opportunity to seek attention and assert control. Saddam’s defiance during his ongoing trial is another manifestation of the pattern.

Understanding the body’s patterns helps us appreciate that Saddam actually seems to come alive when he can defy the world and gather global attention. When he is not engaged in defiance, we see his body’s true baseline, that of an uncomfortable, impassive leader. Ironically, challenging the prosecution during his trial in Baghdad is recuperation for Saddam and what floats his boat. Placing him in view of the international media in the courtroom is the kind of sparring he thrives on, because it allows temporary freedom from the straitjacket of his controlled body attitude.

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### Veracity of Saddam’s Statements

Analysis of the behavioral response of the adversary’s unconscious expression on specific topics, such as Saddam’s statements about WMD or links to al Qaeda, offers additional critical evidence for consideration at the policy, strategy, and operational levels. Saddam’s defiance of the UN Special Commission program to verify the destruction of his WMD and links to al Qaeda were the foundations of our public premise to go to war in Iraq. Since our ability to verify the existence of such weapons had been cut off since 1997—and since U.S. intelligence had scant knowledge about whether Osama bin Laden and Saddam were linked—another means of answering these questions was necessary.

Beneath the well-crafted image, resplendent military uniforms, and displays of himself at rallies and on posters as Iraq’s leader, Saddam was a man whose communicative repertoire is strikingly limited. His speeches were mostly bland and monotonous. Flattering images cannot replace the elements of charisma or energetic intensity so lacking in his presentations. In fact, examples of Saddam displaying personal conviction are rare. His

baseline movement style is one of passive detachment, symptomatic of how psychophysically he became organized to survive early in his difficult childhood.

This disconnection from the present also provides him with a patterned sense of “timelessness,” which offers another explanation for his tendency to ignore ultimatums and deadlines or even to recognize that he is on trial. Even after all that has happened to him, detached in part from the body, he is still comfortable telling himself that he is here to stay and that he remains powerful.

### Dissimulation Pattern

In January 1991, CNN’s Peter Arnett asked Saddam what had happened to the Iraqi air force planes that landed in Iran to avoid destruction. Saddam’s movement went well beyond his baseline evasive mode, and his body organized into active deception. Saddam constrained all of his movement, brought his arms tight to his sides, stopped his head movement and gestures, and displayed no grins (though they often accompany his evasive mode) while he constructed an implausible explanation of what happened.

The historical record shows that the planes did land in Iran and that he lied about that. Thus, we have a snapshot of what he looks like when he dissimulates (what he does when he is actively constructing a lie).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, several of the movement measures he employed in this response were behaviors related to constraint of arms and head and a decrease in gesture, which some deception research has also associated with active dissimulation.<sup>10</sup>

Now that we know what Saddam does when he believes himself and what he has been known to do when he lies, we can examine two of his more recent responses for evidence about the veracity of his statements.

On February 5, 2003, Saddam gave an interview in Iraq to former British Parliamentarian Tony Benn for the Canadian Broadcasting Company. As soon as the interview began, Benn asked Saddam, “Do you have weapons of mass destruction?”

At first, Saddam responded with his baseline evasive style but then rolled into his nit-picking mode where his gestures become segmented,<sup>11</sup> so tightly controlled that the speech and motion correspondence goes off track, signaling a profound separation of thought, movement, and voice revealing a temporary disconnect from his body’s unity of expression.<sup>12</sup>



Umm al-Maarek (Mother of All Battles) mosque near Baghdad has four inner minarets shaped like Scud missiles and four outer minarets resembling the barrels of Kalashnikov rifles



The New York Times (Tyler Hicks)

Context analysis of the verbal assertions that accompany Saddam's heightened segmentation shows that he reduced complex ideas into simple notions, another manifestation of control. This extreme compartmentalization served to disqualify important elements of reality, creating for him a selective perception. This visible movement disorganization broke any momentary unity of expression and is a measurable reflection of the sort of compartmentalized cognition that comes and goes and that suggests that, while Saddam believes what he was saying, he is not fully in touch with reality. The leader recovered with a low level of conviction and concluded, "Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction." There are no signs of active dissimulation in Saddam's response.

Benn, without missing a beat, followed up with, "Does Iraq have links to al Qaeda?" Saddam first flashed a grin, signaling that he was going into one of his evasive responses. He quickly recovered and became clear. In an unfettered way, revealing again the unusual spark of conviction and dynamism in his posture and gesture, he said, "Iraq has no links to al Qaeda."

In a CBS interview 19 days later, Dan Rather also pointedly asked Saddam, "Do you have, or have you had, any connection to al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden?" Again, Saddam grinned and launched into an evasive strategy, throwing back the question, asking Rather whether the root of the anxiety was in the minds of U.S. officials or of the American

people. Saddam then got right on track with low-level conviction as he said, "We have never had any relationship with Mr. Osama bin Laden, and Iraq has never had any relationship with al Qaeda." As he denied the links, there was no contradictory movement. In body, he was telling us again that he was speaking clearly about not having a connection to bin Laden.

To these explicit questions, Saddam begins answering from his baseline evasive style and leaves everyone wondering as to the truth. Evasion is most basically Saddam; it serves him well in many ways. It is a communicative mode that keeps everyone unsure all the time and is one of the mainstays of the former dictator. It

### *Saddam's psychological grandiosity convinces the former dictator that he and Iraq are indistinguishable*

buys him time to defend himself and recover from tough questions. But behavioral movement analysis asks that we stay with the stream of communication a bit longer. If we remain focused through the phases and watch what else occurs in movement during such responses, we can learn more.

Saddam's evasive beginning on the WMD question bought him time, but if we look at the body level, the nit-picking gesture and segmentation emerge. This additional evidence in his hand movements cues us that he is in his hyper-vigilant, highly controlled, cognitively isolated selective reality. During this last international CBS interview in 2003 prior to Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, Saddam's

selective reality emerged when he told an incredulous Dan Rather twice that he won the 1991 Gulf War.

While Saddam's response probably was an attempt to garner Arab support and reflected a calculated defiance against the United States, his statement was accompanied by segmentation, a visible movement disorganization that broke his unity of expression and was measurable evidence of the sort of compartmentalized cognition that suggests that while he believed what he was saying, he was at that moment not fully present in his body or in touch with reality.

### **No Rational Actor**

Many political experts considered Saddam a shrewd strategic planner who misled the international community for over a decade, giving him the false title of "rational actor." The movement patterning Saddam displays in real time is a direct and more reliable indicator and may help us to refine our views of when Saddam was rational. The degree to which this former dictator is fully in reality can be reliably measured through psychodiagnostic indicators of the body's movement according to topic and context, and this measurement becomes a critical aspect of strategic planning for policymakers.

Jerrold Post and Amatzia Baram, in *Saddam Is Iraq, Iraq Is Saddam*, argue that Saddam's psychological grandiosity convinces the former dictator that he and Iraq are indistinguishable. They argue that, in his mind, he and his weapons are one and the same. These authors link Saddam's psychological architecture directly to the Mother of All Battles Mosque, which has four minarets shaped

like Scud missiles and four shaped like assault rifles. Looking directly at his body offers additional concrete evidence strengthening the authors' hypothesis derived both from remote behavioral movement analysis and traditional political history and psychological theory.

Saddam was known for his quintessential displays of the right arm waving to the crowds, emphasizing his status and power. A closer look reveals a profound disconnection between the arm movement and his torso. The arm is so controlled that it is detached energetically from the torso. So, in a sense, as a form of compensation, Saddam's arms (his weapons) are his power—unconsciously an extension of what Post and Baram call the

“wounded self and what the body reveals are missing from the whole.” Saddam and his weapons are one and the same, virtual appendages of the fractured man.

Thus, the emergence of segmentation in his arm movement is not surprising in a 2003 response about WMD. Presumably, even raising the topic made his selective perception go into high gear as the mere mention of separating Saddam from these extensions of self evoked in him a sense of detachment (and unconsciously triggered a deep fear and a sense of further dismemberment) seen in the highly controlled, segmented arm gestures.

In responding to Benn’s question about WMD, Saddam was evasive and segmented, but he did not contradict what he was saying in movement. Though denying verbally that he had WMD is what we expected under any circumstance, he could not, in reality, accept the idea of not having them or, for that matter, of not remaining in power. However, that his movement did not contradict what he was saying is interesting additional information.

What would have been compelling is if, while Saddam denied in words that he had WMD, his body movement had contradicted his claim. There was no such evidence in his display. While underneath he might have been telling himself his own story about the weapons, and hoping to restart his program in the future, his statement that he did not have them was supported by his body movement. And when Benn and Rather asked about links to al Qaeda, Saddam did not display his dissimulation mode. This analysis of his very personal relationship to WMD and what it means to him becomes one more piece of evidence to be used by policymakers and planners.

In a world seeking to understand how to communicate with friend and foe alike to avert conflict, using one more leadership assessment tool can help us predict the behavior of political leaders and remote adversaries to whom we have little access.

Each person has a basic hardwired skill to apprehend movement. Perhaps our greatest interagency challenge will be to attend more consciously to behavior. That involves confronting our resistance to embodying such a perspective. It can be hard to accept that we are so patterned and predictable. Moreover, learning something both new and outside our comfort zone, such as decoding movement patterns, can trigger resistance; thus, we find ways to remain unconscious about them.

Still, failure to embrace this soft dimension of power may lead to serious mistakes.

Some kinds of movement patterns can be read easily with modern teaching tools. Research has demonstrated that the facial expression of human emotion is the same the world over (although what triggers and ultimately shapes the display of those expressions is culturally influenced). Appreciating that critical behavioral knowledge represents just the tip of the iceberg for American officials.

The willful failure to uncover the cognitive decisionmaking style and psychological state of mind of the opponent across the table during negotiating or planning for war denies us a tremendous advantage. If the opponent uses it against us, the advantage will be his. In the end, our opponents are never off stage. Neither are we. **JFQ**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brenda L. Connors and Martha Davis, “Non-verbal Communication Demonstration Project, Micro-analytic Profiling of Foreign Leaders,” unpublished U.S. Government report, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Other evidence continues to emerge about Saddam’s state of mind. See Kevin Woods, James Lacey, Williamson Murray, “Saddam’s Delusions: The View from the Inside,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2006), 2–26.

<sup>3</sup> Brenda L. Connors, “See a Reflection of Saddam’s Biography,” *Naval War College Review* 57, no. 1 (Winter 2004), 113–116.

<sup>4</sup> Brenda L. Connors, “Body Leads: A Non-Traditional Approach to Understanding Leadership and Performance Style,” unpublished U.S. Government primer, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See Paul Starobin, “The Accidental Autocrat,” *Atlantic Monthly* (February–March 2005), 82–92.

<sup>6</sup> We constantly interact with what movement analysis theory calls the *four motion factors*, measures familiar to the political military community: power (weight), time and space (environment), and energy. Analytic appreciation of how a leader interacts with these forces is a primary aspect of understanding a behavioral movement signature.

<sup>7</sup> Charlie Chaplin and Alec Guinness, actors of Hitler’s day, portrayed the Third Reich’s dictator in motion pictures. While certain parts of their performance captured aspects of Hitler’s oratorical style, such as crossing his arms, the careful pausing to keep the crowd waiting, and his smugness, Hitler’s deepest hardwired movement signature, including the movement disorganization manifest in the uncontrollable twitch in his right hand, which he tried to hide during speeches by tucking it beneath his left upper arm, could not be replicated by even the generation’s best actors.

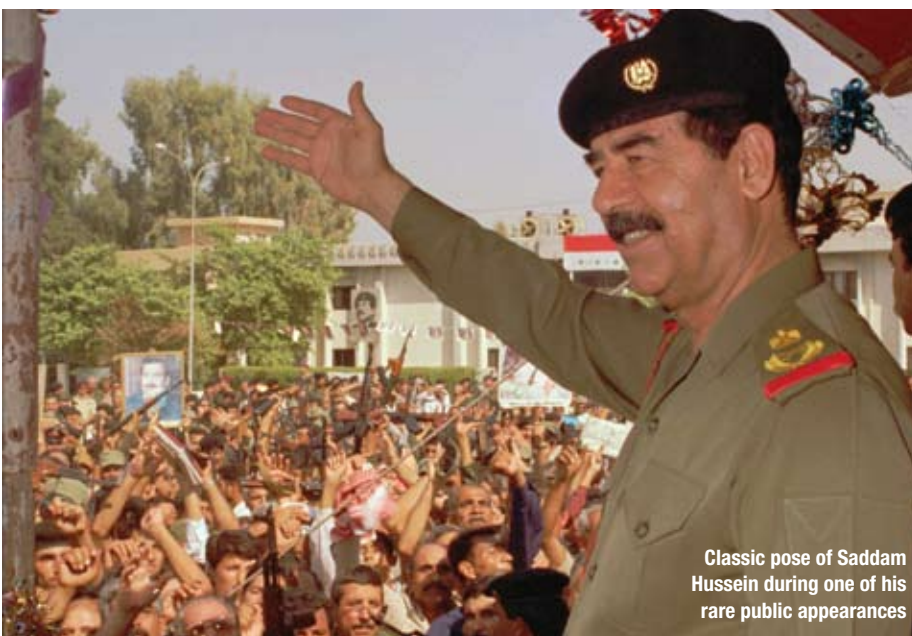
<sup>8</sup> A movement repertoire will include a person’s stress signs. Studies of footage for over two decades included analysis of one particular unconscious micro-expression of stress that a master movement expert with over 30 years of experience had actually analyzed for cues to inner motivation and the phrasing of his actions.

<sup>9</sup> The same posture is seen in images taken with former U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie during her last meeting with Saddam.

<sup>10</sup> B.M. De Paulo et al., “Cues to Deception,” *Psychological Bulletin* 129 (2003), 74–118.

<sup>11</sup> See M. Davis and D. Hadiks, “Demeanor and Credibility,” *Semiotica* 106 (1995), 5–54.

<sup>12</sup> Saddam at such moments, when his thinking is in overdrive, often corrects his competent interpreters.



Classic pose of Saddam Hussein during one of his rare public appearances